

FALL
2023

Enlightener

EA
EAST AURORA
SCHOOL DISTRICT 131



DUAL LANGUAGE ALL SCHOOLS K-3

*Language Really is
Our Super Power!*

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One Team, One Plan: Consistent & Climbing

East Aurora School District 131
Family and Friends,

As I begin my 6th year as the very proud Superintendent of our beloved district, I marvel at how far we have come. This has only been possible with our amazing TEAM committed to our core PLAN for student achievement. A plan that is complex yet very simple- to work every day in each of our roles to our fullest potential, to make sure that each of our students can *Reach Their Full Potential!*

We have accomplished each milestone through a focus on Equity, Excellence, and Collaborative Leadership. Our noteworthy and nationally recognized parent collaboration, language acquisition programming, and success in college course offerings are evidence of a shift in paradigm for our entire district. A paradigm that celebrates who we are as a community and builds on our strengths as we challenge our students to the highest national and international standards-successfully. Our portrait of a graduate has grown both in numbers of prepared young people and also in the broadness of their success.

This year we celebrate both remaining consistent in our improvement efforts and our climbing higher in student achievement. Kudos to the faculty, staff, parents and our students at *Johnson Elementary School* and *Fred Rodgers Magnet Academy* for earning **Exemplary Recognition** on the Illinois State Board of Education designations- labeling those schools in the top performing 10% in the State!

Kudos to faculty, staff, parents and students from East Aurora High School, East Aurora Extension Campus (EAEC) and our partnership East Aurora Excel Academy (EA)² program with Quad County Urban League, for each working to accomplish our largest class of graduates yet with an 89% graduation rate! Our graduates are exceeding all previous rates across the board in those earning the Seal of Commendation and Bilingual and early college credit hours. This is through steadily increasing numbers of successfully passed Advanced Placement and Waubensee Community College courses.

We celebrate our faculty and staff from Tiny Tomcats in Jumpstart- with the *National Blue Ribbon*-affiliate status, our Pre-Kindergarten remaining in the *Gold Circle* status and our 12 elementary and middle schools who have maintained statewide Commendable Designations!

We recognize that we still have great work to accomplish as we examine our underperforming subgroups across all schools more deeply to find additional methods to close opportunity gaps that exist and mitigate factors impacting learning loss.

Our TEAM looks forward to making greater connections with our community as we increase partnerships to provide every student expanded opportunities and experiences around college & careers. Our goals are to prepare all students for post-secondary education and training, enabling them to be competitive entering the workforce and to expose students to a variety of careers to align with their strengths and passions in life.

Thank you for continuing to assist us in our efforts and celebrate the success of our students across the entire East Aurora School District 131 Community! We continue to be consistent and climbing with your support!

Dr. Jennifer Norrell
Superintendent



Tilly, our Gates Elementary School comfort dog, with student.



Dr. Jennifer Norrell
Superintendent

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SUPERINTENDENT
Dr. Jennifer Norrell

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EASD 131 Increases Assets and Achievements While Reducing Costs to Taxpayers!

Hello East Aurora 131 Community,

On behalf of the Board of Education, I bring greetings and thanks for your continued support and partnership in making sure our community has great schools! I am excited to share many updates on our state-of-the-art programs, facilities improvements and financial accomplishments- all positively impacting the value of our community at-large.

We celebrate the addition of 3rd grade Dual Language in all of our elementary schools as we proudly expand annually the State of Illinois' only district-wide dual language program. Not only is dual language a highly sought-after program in schools across the nation but recent data from our students illustrate positive student achievement results that mirror the research used when the Board of Education agreed to implement dual language district-wide 4 years ago.

Our elementary schools are also benefiting from our Pet Therapy Program. With the addition of 10 comfort dogs and growing, including Rosemary (whom you may have seen featured on the cover of Naperville Magazine), Tilly, Gus, Jake, Hazel, Ace, Maverick, Sadie, Max, and Oakley (on the cover of this Enlightener with Beaupre 3rd graders). These furry friends are filling our elementary schools with joy 3 days a week and simultaneously have made a huge impact on student social and emotional well-being.

There is also much to celebrate in facilities improvements. Heating and air-conditioning (HVAC) completion continues with Cowherd MS in the summer of 2024. Following this project, EA will now have air-conditioning in ALL schools! Plans to begin upgrading HVAC across East High in a multi-year project are forthcoming. The BOE has invested roughly \$100M in our buildings, which has taken 5 years and has been critical for maintaining the internal health and wellness of our school environments and enhancing student and staff performance.

This winter, we are poised to open the new Resilience Education Center. This location will serve as an afterschool extended and co-curricular learning site for students in middle and high school. This site will also function as an expansion during the school day providing

state-of-the-art elective course spaces for high school juniors and seniors. Additionally, this site will offer counseling services for students and families, with a focus on social wellness, allowing EASD 131 families to participate in potential activities 7 days a week.



Annette Johnson
Board President

Finally, our financial recognition status remains at the highest level for the past 8 years. This year, the BOE celebrated the completion of the Illinois State Board of Education 3-year Grant Audit for the largest grant funding period in the district's history, totaling roughly \$200M in federal and state grant funding from 2019-2020 through the current 2022-2023 years. This 9-month in-depth audit ended with a successful final report with *zero material findings*.

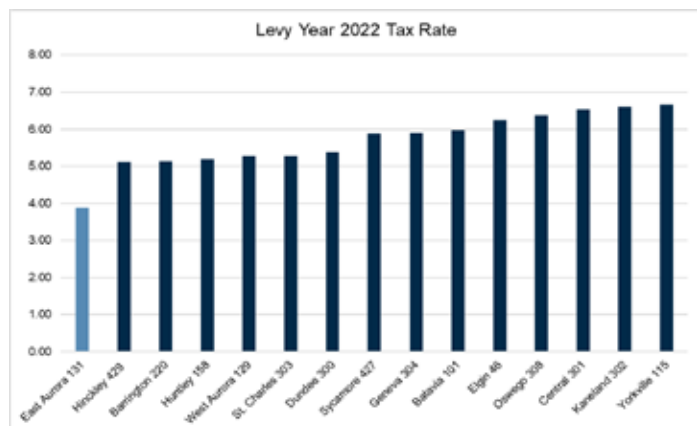
The Board is also preparing for another year with the *lowest tax rate in Kane County*. A rate that is historically lower than ever before and we are preparing for a tax levy that may actually reduce tax costs for many of our constituents.

The Board of Education thanks you for continually being committed to the students of East Aurora School District 131.

Thank you,

Annette Johnson
Board of Education President

Historical Tax Rates in the District



Source: Kane County Clerk's Office



GET INVOLVED IN EASD 131

PARENT ADVISORY GROUPS

Engage with all that is growing in District 131 and share your ideas! The following advisory groups are available for parents/guardians, staff, students, or community partners to participate in throughout the school year.

Visit www.d131.org/parent-groups to learn more about each of our EASD 131 parent advisory groups.



BILINGUAL PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL (BPAC)

BPAC advocates for excellence in all programs serving English Learners in District 131, providing support to families and facilitating relationships amongst school leaders, parents, and District 131 staff.

AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENT ASSOCIATION (AAPA)

AAPA bridges the connection between schools and families in the African American community and how best to expand academic and career resources for these students.

COUNCIL OF AMBASSADORS FOR ALL PARENTS (CAAP)

CAAP is a selective council for any parent/guardian who is an active member of at least one advisory council in the district. Members meet with the Superintendent quarterly.

SUPERINTENDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

Students, parents/guardians, staff, and community partners are invited to discuss the latest district initiatives, generate ideas, and review and respond to data with Dr. Jennifer Norrell, Superintendent of Schools.

NEW!

EAST AURORA DADS

Calling all dads! This group is a supportive, encouraging space for EASD 131 fathers to learn more about the ways they can actively participate in their student's journey, in and outside of the classroom.



Family Fall Festival Celebrates Latino Culture & Heritage

Tomcats Welcomed the Fall Season and Hispanic Heritage at First Event of its Kind

As the leaves changed their hue, East Aurora families were given an opportunity to savor those last warm afternoons and welcome the fall season in earnest at the 2023 Family Fall Festival. Hosted by District 131, the event took place at Blackberry Farm in Aurora—a sprawling venue known to many Aurora children and families and featuring playgrounds, a working train, ample picnic space, and fun, educational exhibits on pioneer life.

For the festival, Blackberry Farm was taken over by Tomcats in action, where school and district leaders were amongst the friendly faces welcoming East Aurora families to the free event. Students from PreK-12th grade were able to attend with their siblings and families for a night of live music, food, and community-led entertainment.



5th grader, Isabel Ruiz, sings with the Mariachi band at the Family Fall Festival.

Working in tandem to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, the Family Fall Festival featured performances from Ballet Folklorico Yetlanezi, Inc. and a Mariachi band—the latter of which saw 5th grader Isabel Ruiz of Johnson Elementary School join the group for a number as lead singer.

A magician and balloon artist entertained East Aurora students as well, while Aurora legend, DJ Suavesmooth ensured students and families of all ages were able to dance the summer season away at the outdoor event.

An ode to the spirit and flavors of fall would not have been complete without ample caramel apples for Tomcats to choose and enjoy. Celebrating both Latin culture and community and the traditional seasonal festivities of the autumn season, the Family Fall Festival ushered in what could be an annual tradition for District 131 families to look to as September dawns each year.

Four Years Strong: Dual Language Continues to Thrive

Dual Language Students Total Nearly 4,000 District-Wide



O'Donnell Elementary School students.

This fall, East Aurora warmly welcomed our students back to school, adding one more grade level to our district-wide dual language program. Now serving all students in Pre-Kindergarten through third grade, dual language programming in East Aurora embodies the vision of Superintendent Dr. Jennifer Norrell and the EA Board of Education, where language and culture are celebrated and respected as an asset for our students.

“Our nation trails many countries in bilingualism,” said Superintendent Dr. Norrell. “One of the tremendous assets of our district is the ability to be a leader and model in the nation for increasing not just bilingualism but biliteracy in thousands of young people-- making students who chose to attend East Aurora- able to compete globally in whichever industry they choose.”

EASD 131 demonstrates language being critical for students to develop as fully bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural. East Aurora's premier dual language program celebrates language as a super power for our families and broader community.

The addition of third grade to our dual language program is an exciting turning point for our students as we round out all primary grades in our 13 elementary schools with dual language. Students continue to learn math, social studies, and science in both English and Spanish. The benefits of learning multiple languages are afforded to all students in East Aurora demonstrating that we believe our students will lead the way as future-focused, global citizens of the world.

The components of District 131's dual language curriculum were written, researched, and produced by district leaders—including Dr. Lisa Dallacqua, Dr. Rita Guzman, and Tina Clement in consultation with many experts in language acquisition on the national landscape.

“[Our dual language curriculum] is home-grown to meet our students' and community's needs. No one has pieced together and assembled resources to meet the challenges of a dual language curriculum in this way,” said Dr. Rita Guzman, Executive Director of Language Acquisition and Early Learning.

Dr. Lisa Dallacqua, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessments and Grants, echoed this hands-on, intentional development of a program which embraces the diversity of District 131 family- including all classroom books and text selections that students read and use within their lessons. Programs, events, and activities demonstrate a celebration of East Aurora's diversity.

Events and classroom units study the diversity of Latin languages—including those from Panama, Argentina, Spain, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and more— expand East Aurora's vision for our students to embrace the language and cultures of these incredible nations. Cultural exploration activities connected to daily instruction in English and Spanish, deliberately bring to the forefront the traditions and heritage of East Aurora communities.

Dr. Dallacqua calls investment in the rich cultural pieces of our Spanish-speaking communities an opportunity to create space for cultural storytelling that is not often told in traditional curriculum. With the celebration of language and culture at its center, the dual language program of East Aurora prioritizes these stories, and reminds our community of their importance.

None of the growth that we have seen from our dual language program would be possible without the school to family and community connection. Continuous engagement is at the center of one of the district's largest parent groups, the Bilingual Parent Advisory Council (BPAC). Meeting every month, BPAC is an opportunity for families to become involved in the academic and social growth of their children in an environment which encourages positive parent/staff relationships, communication, and advocacy. District 131's BPAC was recently recognized in a panel led by principal consultants of the Multilingual Department from the Illinois State Board of Education. Being called a “*model parent engagement program*” by the Illinois State Board of Education, East Aurora is proud of our parents and their commitment to being involved with their children's education.



Teacher Assistant, Mrs. Moyet, working with 1st graders at Benavides STEAM Academy to reinforce their reading skills.



Nationally recognized researcher and advocate Dr. Kim Potowski has led educational sessions for early childhood and dual language parents. Dr. Potowski has educated our families through workshops and presentations on behalf of the district since 2020, encouraging active involvement in language and cultural development of our children and championing the power of multilingual education for long-term success.

The Seal of Biliteracy award is another focus for East Aurora School District 131, honoring the language accomplishments of our students through an official State of Illinois Seal recognition on their high school diplomas.

This Seal recognizes high school graduates who have attained proficiency in one or more languages other than English and illustrates the level of language acquisition and development. The Class of 2018 graduated only 35 students earning a biliteracy recognition, 2019 increased to 41, followed by 2020 with 86 Seal of Biliteracy awards given to District 131 students, followed by a steady increase in the Class of 2022, with 222 awards acknowledged. This past year's graduating class saw a staggering 324 students receive the Commendation and Seal of Biliteracy award, launching East Aurora as one of the largest number of Seals earned in our region.

The rise in Seal of Biliteracy awards in East Aurora is significant and follows an emphasis on a college and career framework that continues to rise in public school districts on a national level, according to Dr. Dallacqua. The Seal of Biliteracy and the language accomplishments of East Aurora students is now considered as important as career education classes, Advanced Placement (AP) courses, experiential learning, and dual credit opportunities for post-graduation success. East Aurora's Superintendent, Dr. Norrell, continues to emphasize these pieces for our East Aurora Tomcats as they continue their journey throughout high school.

And while elementary school, at a glance, seems like



Ms. Anguiano and her 2nd grade class during Language Workshop at Benavides STEAM Academy.

an early time to be drawing connections between classroom experiences and success in the workforce, dual language education at the preschool and kindergarten level is an example of this integrated emphasis on post-graduate success which begins early in a Tomcat's journey.

Producing multilingual candidates for university and workforce placements is one of many ways in which the Superintendent's own emphasis on *College & Career for All* is beginning at early levels. Yet the importance of following a student's dual language journey from their Tiny Tomcat years to their commencement day goes even deeper.

"[A student's] bilingualism is a gift," Dr. Dallacqua said. "It's not something that goes away in high school." It is a salient point which further demonstrates the priorities of District 131 leadership—when painting the portrait of an East Aurora graduate, care is given not only to how students are best able to present and speak for themselves, but who students are able to become. This acknowledgement of the inherent strength in the diversity of all students is a rung on the ladder of opportunity which a dual language environment continues to climb skyward.





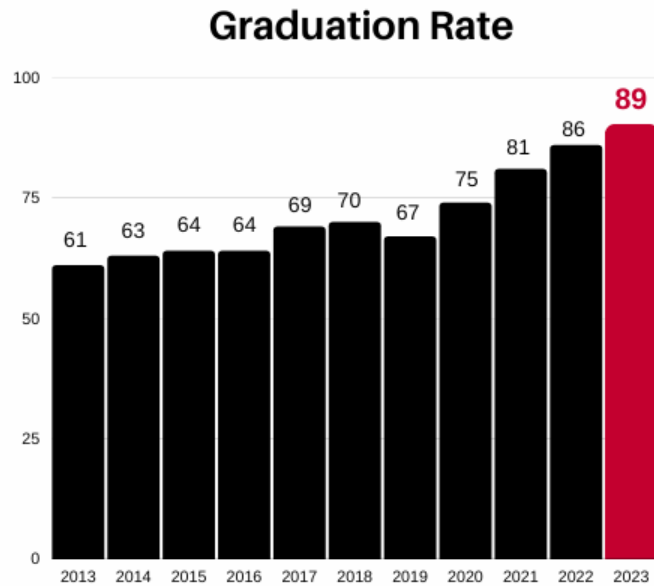
Consistent & Climbing: 2023 State Report Card

With the number of students taking Early College Courses at an all-time high, students at East Aurora High School continue to raise the bar for excellence in District 131. The rise in Seal of Biliteracy Awards illustrates the district's emphasis on language competency for the purpose of post-secondary readiness. The Illinois State Report Card reflects these incredible achievements—the realization of which would not be possible without the dedication of our parents, teachers, school leaders, Board of Education, and our guiding principles of Educational Equity, Operational Excellence, Collaborative Leadership, and Student Achievement.



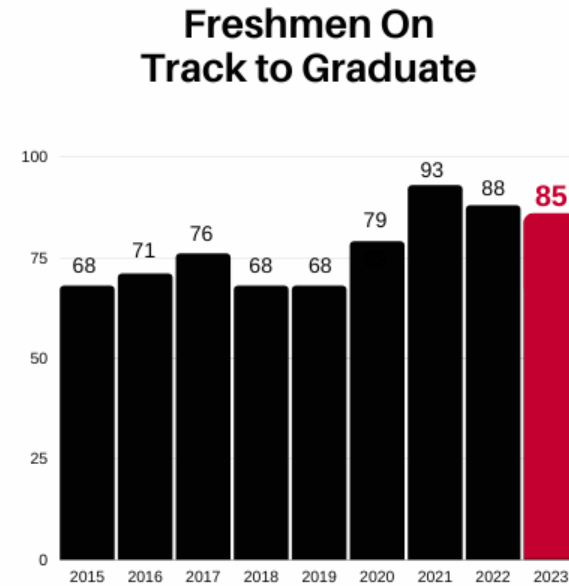
Our Guiding Principles

- Educational Equity
- Operational Excellence
- Collaborative Leadership
- Student Achievement



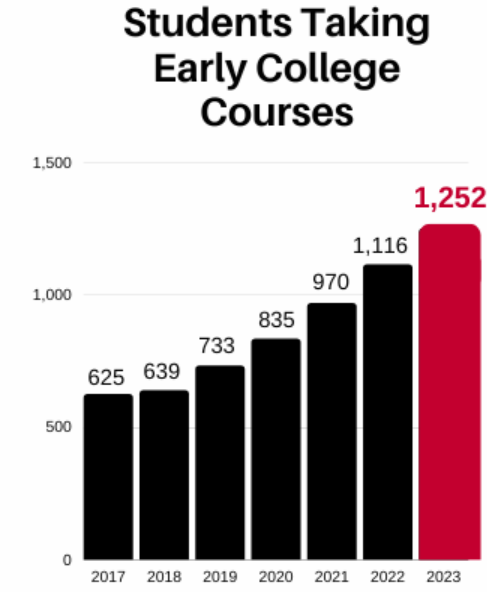
↑ 3%

A 10-year high and 3% increase over last year's graduation rate.



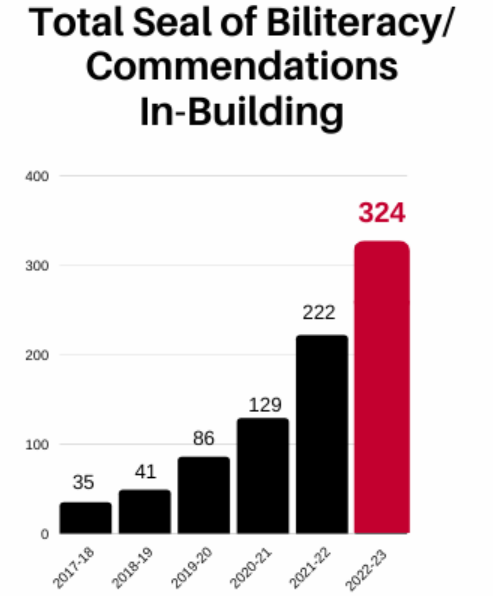
↓ 3%

3% decrease of freshmen on track to graduate in four years.



↑ 12%

12% increase of students taking Early College Courses including Advanced Placement and Dual Credit.



↑ 46%

46% increase of students earning the Seal of Biliteracy or Commendation for Biliteracy.

Celebrating Language Learning Throughout D131

5,228

Students learning a new language in East Aurora daily.



646 Pre-K Dual Prep
3,422 Elementary
313 Middle School
847 High School

Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Designations

The Every School Succeeds Act from the U.S. Department of Education requires all states in the nation to assign summative designations to their schools. ISBE has five categories for its designations—*Exemplary, Commendable, Targeted, Comprehensive, and Intensive Support.*

Exemplary

Schools performing in the top 10% of schools statewide, with no underperforming student groups.



Commendable

A school that has no underperforming student groups and whose performance is not in the top 10% of schools statewide.



Targeted & Comprehensive



A Targeted designation indicates schools (designated as performing in 2018) have one or more student groups that are performing at or below the lowest 5% "all students" group. A Comprehensive designation indicates schools (underperforming in 2018) have one or more subgroups performing at or below the lowest 5% of schools.



Resilience Education Center: Programming for the Entire Family

January 2024 Opening for EA Students and Family Activities



The Resilience Education Center (R.E.C.) is located at 417 Fifth St., Aurora.

The Resilience Education Center (R.E.C.) began work in the summer of 2022, when Superintendent Dr. Jennifer Norrell welcomed the project's start with thanks given to the Board of Education, city officials, and parent association leadership on what would begin a new chapter in District 131's commitment to advanced high school course offerings, afterschool and weekend activities and programs for East Aurora students and families.

Dr. Norrell worked with the District 131 Board of Education to implement the R.E.C.'s concept of using state-of-the-art facilities in a welcoming space to promote student and family well-being through mental health services and social wellness for all.

"When we explored ways to mitigate the setbacks from trauma that our students—like students across the country—had endured following the effects of the pandemic, we decided it wasn't enough to recover back to a 'pre-pandemic' [state]; we wanted to move our kids beyond where they were previously," said Superintendent Dr. Norrell. "We wanted to highlight, promote, and support resilience in a major way, to create something to support the social wellness and future readiness for the [entire East Aurora] family. The Resilience Education Center will help all of us in East Aurora School District 131 reach our full potential."

After-school programs, including art, ceramics, dance, yoga, spoken word poetry, music recording, E-sports, and culinary arts, will find a home at the R.E.C. in January 2024, where meals, snacks, and a barista service will further stamp the center as one where students are encouraged to socialize, engage with their peers, and spend time in-district honing their passions. Private individual and group counseling will also be available for students who are referred to such services, situating the space as one which nurtures both the social and emotional development of students—a true safe space.

Dr. Norrell hopes to communicate the district's deliberate efforts at providing middle and secondary students the opportunity to succeed in college, the workplace, and beyond by providing a space for students to be exposed to advanced level electives while creating a love for new learning. The elective offerings the high school will provide at the R.E.C. include courses in 3-D art, music production, Broadcast Journalism, game coding, dance, and culinary arts. The new Broadcast Journalism course will allow students to write scripts and broadcast newscasts live from the R.E.C.'s studio—complete with industry-level camera equipment, an anchor desk, and more.

Parent workshops and classes will also find a home at the R.E.C., which will house space for families with counseling referrals to engage in these services on campus. Monthly calendars will highlight student and family opportunities for engagement during the week and weekend. The district plans for the center to include parent-child culinary classes via a new kitchen, 'Mommy & Me' music, dance, and yoga classes; parent book clubs, among other workshops.

Assistant Director of the Resilience Education Center, Mariza Martinez, said a goal of the center will be to engage families through enrichment classes and presentations by guest speakers for families to learn and enjoy.

By providing high-quality programming both during the day and after school for students, the hope is to expand the academic offerings, improve student wellness and socialization among peers, and enhance entire family engagement in East Aurora School District 131. Fostering these offerings to take place within the same physical space as counseling and peer-connection activities furthers the R.E.C.'s mission to exist as a holistic wellness service for students and families of East Aurora.



WHAT'S NEW & EXCITING IN EAST AURORA

★ NEW PLAYGROUND SITES TRANSFORM PLAY FOR THE BETTER

The playground sites of O'Donnell, Hermes, Johnson, Allen, and Beaupre Elementary Schools were recently upgraded to reflect a fresh, new take on these social wellness centers. All remaining elementary schools in the district will receive their upgrade by the end of summer 2024.

District 131 playground sites have 24 ADA-compliant components per site, ensuring all students, no matter their ability, have access to appropriate and inclusive movement and play opportunities. Stay tuned to view East Aurora's continued developments in operational excellence.



Johnson Elementary School Playground.

★ EA PAWS PROGRAM

What began as school visits from the Board of Education President and her dog, Snoopy, evolved into District 131 welcoming its first in-school comfort animal back in 2020. East Aurora now has 10 fully trained comfort dogs, whose presence in schools make an incredible difference in the social-emotional development of our students.

If you are interested in joining our team or know of a dog that would be a perfect fit for the EA Paws Program, please contact Robyn Dixon, Assistant Director of Student Services, at rdixon@d131.org.



Hermes Elementary School students and Gus the comfort dog.

★ INTRODUCING: ACCESS 411

A new program requires students at the middle and high school level to scan the unique barcode on their student badge when arriving at their home building, in a more streamlined effort to manage attendance.

The online system links up with the Student Information System (SIS) which District 131 currently utilizes to manage student attendance, syncing every night to ensure accuracy. This makes it a highly valuable program for managing student data and safety, according to East Aurora School District 131 Safety and Security Manager, Kevin Jenkins.

"[Access 411] is not just for safety. It can be a positive behavior intervention system, too," Jenkins said.

Transportation services will also use portable scanners, making the program a holistic security system aimed at ensuring Tomcat students are safe and well accounted for.



EAHS student scans their badge.

The Board of Education Celebrates Another Year of Accomplishments

Yet Again With the Lowest Tax Rate in the County

District 131 continues to elevate its offerings for students and families through the guidance of the Board of Education. Local school boards are given the responsibility by the State of Illinois to set policies for the approval of curricular decisions, the adoption of an annual budget, operational construction, employment, and the hiring and evaluation of the superintendent.

Learn more about the Board of Education at www.d131.org.



Ms. Annette Johnson, President
Years of Service:
2009-present



Mr. Dan Barreiro, Vice President
Years of Service:
2003-2007; 2017-present



Mr. Bruce Schubert, Secretary
Years of Service:
2017-present



Mr. Alex Arroyo
Years of Service:
2015-present



Mr. Judd Lofchie
Years of Service:
2022-present



Mr. Saul Olivas
Years of Service:
2022-present



Mr. Juan Sifuentes Jr.
Years of Service:
2019-present



Ms. Alondra Limón
Student Board Member
2023-2024 school year



Mr. Edward Zavala
Student Board Member
2023-2024 school year

2017-2018

- Bus transportation for students PreK-12th for the first time in the district's 167-year history
- New *Marie Wilkinson Food Pantry* opens at East Aurora High School
- Search conducted for new Superintendent; Board hires Dr. Jennifer Norrell

2018-2019

- EASD 131 Strategic Planning; mission, vision, and a five-year strategic plan
- District restructures 16M in debt and increases fund balance
- Historic three-year contract signed with East Aurora Council, AFT Local 604 Teachers Union
- Addition of energy-efficient lighting in all 20 school sites
- East Aurora Excel Academy opens new site on Indian Trail Road
- 59 new air-conditioning rooftop units added across the district

2019-2020

- New heating and air conditioning added to seven elementary schools
- 1:1 Pre-K through 12th grade electronic devices
- iPad Mini's, iPads, laptops and hotspots for all students
- New Administration District Office purchased
- Newly-built Professional Development Center and Board Room
- Early Childhood Center and adjacent building purchased on Indian Trail Road
- 13 out of 17 schools designated as Commendable Status by State of Illinois

2020-2021

- Implemented first district-wide Dual Language Program for all Kindergarten
- New heating & air conditioning added to one middle school and two additional elementary schools
- Building expansion for Gonzalez Child Center for Adventures Alternative Program K-5th grade; six new high tech classrooms, pet therapy room, yoga studio, cafeteria, gymnasium and courtyard

2021-2022

- Adventures program opens in addition to a brand new Administrative Center in the old Copley Center Campus
- HVAC upgrades scheduled for summer 2022 for five additional buildings
- Expanded the district-wide Dual Language program to include all Kindergarten and 1st grade students

2022-2023

- Additional 5 HVAC upgrades completed totaling 15 buildings in the last 4 years
- Dual Language Program district-wide through 2nd grade
- Lowest tax levy at an all-time low of 3.89%
- Ground-breaking of Resilience Education Center

2023-2024

- Dual Language Program district-wide through 3rd grade
- 5 elementary schools receive updated playgrounds
- Lowest anticipated tax levy rate at an all-time low of 3.62%
- New Resilience Education Center set to open in winter 2024
- New HVAC systems in 18 schools by summer 2024

8

Number of consecutive years the Illinois State Board of Education has designated EASD 131 as "Financial Recognition" – the highest possible ranking.

Financial Recognition

Financial Review

Financial Early Warning

Financial Watch

10

Number of consecutive years the EASD 131 tax rate has been reduced - record low tax rates while continuing to expand opportunities.

